

Washington State Patrol Media Release

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April 27, 2004

For Immediate Release

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The WSP Commercial Vehicle Division Announces Dramatic Increase in Contacts for the 1st Quarter 2004

Washington State Patrol Chief Lowell Porter announced today that the Commercial Vehicle Division (CVD) showed dramatic increases in its core mission during the first quarter 2004. The following statistics pertain to commercial vehicles that were contacted by CVD officers:

- 3,001 speed violations, 43% increase over first quarter 2003
- 367 following too close violations, 65% increase over first quarter 2003
- 631 Left lane violations, 102% increase over first quarter 2003
- 1,013 Seatbelt violations, 99% increase over first quarter 2003
- 34,916 commercial vehicle inspections, 1% increase over first quarter 2003
- 221 Aggressive Driving violations, 256% increase over first quarter 2003
- 41,385 total contacts, 9% increase over first quarter 2003

"It is important to note that these achievements have been attained without increases in staffing levels and even though the activity has increased, the percentage of enforcement (citations issued) remained steady at 15%," explained Chief Porter. The number of commercial vehicles placed "out of service" (not allowed to continue to operate) declined, which indicated the quality of equipment and drivers has improved.

According to CVD Captain Coral Estes, these successes can be directly attributed to the partnership with the Washington Trucking Associations (WTA). "The WTA has worked very hard to educate their membership of the importance of adherence to all traffic safety requirements," Captain Estes said. "We value our partnership with WTA."

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Sidebar: Commercial Vehicle Division Offers Highway Safety Advice

CVD officers have historically focused on the actions of commercial truck drivers and the equipment they operate, but another serious problem has been identified that needs to be

addressed. WTA and other members of the trucking industry have participated in a program known as Step Up and Ride, which has been recognized and modeled nationally. This program was created when the WSP discovered that the vast majority of collisions involving commercial vehicles (approximately 75% over the past couple of years) were caused by the passenger car. This was a surprising statistic because there is a common misperception that truck drivers cause most of the collisions. The WSP began to actively search for solutions to this problem.

Trooper Maureen Crandall created an innovative approach to the problem, which has come to be known as the Step Up and Ride program, which was unveiled last July. This involves a trooper riding in the cab of a commercial vehicle for the purpose of observing traffic violations that are committed by passenger cars driving near commercial vehicles. The trooper videotapes the violations from the cab and then radios to a trooper that is trailing in a marked patrol unit and makes the traffic stop. The goal of this program is to educate the public of the specific dangers present when operating near large commercial trucks.

It is critical for motorists to understand that large trucks need more distance to stop; therefore making quick lane changes or "cutting off" a truck could have disastrous consequences.

Motorists need to be aware that commercial vehicles have more and larger "blind spots" than passenger cars. The size of the trailer(s) and the configuration of the truck impairs the driver's ability to see vehicles that are directly in front of, beside and/or behind the truck. It is important for motorists to understand that if they can't see the truck driver, the truck driver can't see them.

When merging onto the freeway under normal circumstances, all vehicles should use the entrance ramp to accelerate to the posted speed limit and enter the freeway without interrupting the existing flow of traffic if possible. This is obviously very difficult or even impossible for large or loaded commercial vehicles. It is the responsibility of the vehicle entering the freeway to yield to all other traffic already traveling on the highway. It is a recommended courtesy for those vehicles already established on the freeway to move over to allow traffic to merge if possible/practical.

It is very common to observe impatient drivers speeding around the slower moving trucks while they are merging onto the freeway. We recommend backing off and remaining behind the truck, leaving plenty of distance, so there is room to safely accelerate up the entrance ramp once the truck has merged into traffic. Do not cut across the gore point (the white lines separating the mainline from the entrance ramp) to pass the truck. This is a very dangerous violation. If you are behind a large truck on an entrance ramp, the simple keys to safety are patience, increasing following distance, and not passing or cutting out of line. If you cut across the gore point and accelerate past the truck onto the main line, the truck is now forced to yield to you. This is not only rude, it is dangerous and not the way an entrance ramp was designed to operate. These violations (improper lane travel and unsafe passing) also occur when slower moving passenger cars are attempting to merge onto the freeway.

Another core goal of CVD is to enforce left lane violations. The purpose of this is to educate commercial truck drivers to stay out of the left lane in areas where they are restricted. There is more to this problem than just slow moving vehicles. Large trucks in the left lane limits visibility of the traffic ahead and increases traffic congestion which is known to lead to aggressive driving and road rage. All slower moving vehicles should stay out of the left lane unless they are passing. This is the law, so do your part not to contribute to the problem. If another driver wants to pass, move out of the way and let them go. Keep in mind that the WSP has dramatically increased its speed enforcement, therefore be assured that our officers will catch up to those speeders sooner than they might expect.

For those motorists that refuse to move out of the left lane, they should be aware that they are breaking the law and actually creating a very dangerous situation for themselves and for others. Some people lose their composure when they get frustrated in traffic and this can lead to road rage. This situation is very real and should not be taken lightly. Citizens have been killed on our highways when enraged drivers act out against other drivers (road rage).

CVD recently deployed the Aggressive Driving Apprehension Team (ADAT) across Washington State. This team is comprised of nine troopers that are focused on aggressively driven commercial vehicles as well as those passenger cars that are driving aggressively around commercial vehicles. Aggressive driving occurs when drivers become impatient with existing traffic conditions and/or the actions of other drivers and begin to drive erratically (speeding, tail-gating, weaving in and out of traffic, etc.).

Road rage occurs when drivers retaliate against those they feel have somehow “wronged” them. An example of this would be intentionally cutting off someone and slamming on your brakes to get back at them for cutting you off. Keep in mind that most of the time people are completely unaware that they have cut someone off and it is not an intentional act. Even if someone cuts you off, remember, it’s not personal. There are many different types of personalities with different levels of driving skills and experience and we’re all attempting to share the same highway. So those of you that tend to get frustrated and angry while driving need to maintain your composure regardless of the circumstances. Not following this advice can lead to injury and death.

The WSP is working very hard to develop programs that will curtail aggressive driving and road rage. Again, we would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of patience and courtesy while driving. It could save your life.

The WSP recognizes that our work is not yet finished, but we are proud of the efforts of our officers and their achievements. We will continue to listen to the concerns of our citizens, partner with our stakeholders, and be innovative in our approach to traffic law enforcement.

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